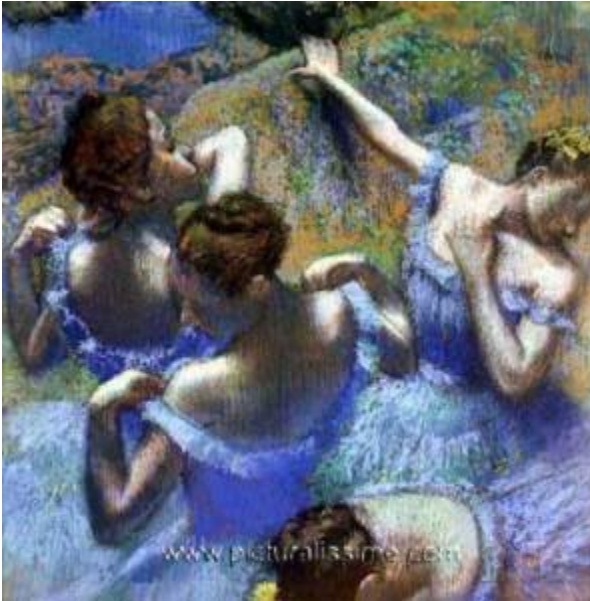


Innocence and Experience



Conveying the transience of innocence and the richness of experience has always been one task of serious artists; but, very noticeably, this imperative-to-represent was missing in twentieth century art. Experience was very highly prized over innocence, and the delicate transitions between the two represented scantily. One thing Abby Heller-Burnham's paintings do is to make a formal and thematic advance on the best paintings of the nineteenth century, while bypassing the detours of abstraction and superficiality which make a trivialized travesty of the twentieth (with the notable exception of Picasso and a few others). Two paintings are presented here: the "Blue Dancers" of Edgar Degas, and Abby Heller-Burnham's "The Skaters." If Degas' work has in it here a cutting edge, it's that the gracefulness and harmonious interaction of the three dancers is undercut by the shocking rawness of the blue coloration. Not

just a blue is used but almost a livid blue, suggesting pain and discomfort, but also contemplation, meditation, and spiritual growth out of this discomfort. In other words, the process of growing up. Heller-Burnham's skaters are bound together by the stark desolation of an urban setting; but the chiaroscuro around them suggests the freedoms and intermittent joys of urban adolescence. Rather than Degas' interlocking limbs, we have Heller-Burnham's sliced-and-diced spatial contours, which pair figures with open passages and trails to follow. Neither picture conveys what the experience of childhood and adolescence will deliver to each set of three kids; neither shies away from recounting the darker edges of maturational processes; what we experience is a world multifarious enough in possibilities to grant that experiences gained in innocence may lead to interlocking harmonies or blueness, opened passages or shadow.